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10/27/1987

Radio Interview with Radford Leggett (93 yrs old at the time)

abt. 1987

Start of tape L. We didn't relish strangers coming in

"How did people get by?"

L Lots of gifts and food came in from other places, remember the Community was small and everyone had their own poultry, vegetable gardens Cows etc, they fared well. In a very short weeks make shift stores popped up and supplied the community — very self sufficient. We called them ranches, lots of 10, 20 or 30 acres plots they grew prunes, hops. Hops was the big crop

"What happened to hops?"

L Well we had fog and mildew. We grew a hop as large as a prune it made fine Pilsner beer but at that time the young folks wanted light beer so when light beer came into play this hop was not good for it; needed the small hop. Sacramento through irrigation was able to grow the small hop.

"Please tell us what you can of the railroad"

L In 1904 my folks bought piece of property on Sebastopol Rd + Fulton The school was on the south side of the RR tracks when it was moved it left a vacant piece so the R R Co built a dining room and cared for the workmen. I was 12 at the time and spent most of my time going over there, they even issued me a hand car and told me I was the inspector. Of course it was all play but the men were wonderful. The line was built into S. Rosa and I had the privilege of riding on the first car into Santa Rosa It came in at Railroad Square and then on to Grace Bros. at the end of 4th St. It did a great deal of business took hops and fruits, materials and loaded them on to boats to go down the river to San Francisco.

"Did you ever imagine as a child that this little community of 600 people would become a city?"

L No but it was a jewel of a city; you could come into town go to the Magnolia Hotel on 4th st and get a dinner for 50¢ I knew Jake Loopoyd had a saloon on Main St. He was a card one of a kind He knew all the other saloon keepers and he had his pet names for them

(2) He had one wall plastered with I.O.U.s, he never turned a man down, so if you were broke he'd just write another I O U
One time he bought a car don't know what kind but it was a lemon, gave him trouble all kinds of trouble. Hops had dropped at that time from to 9, 10 or 12¢ a # and it cost 10¢ # to produce.
He decided to do something about it. It was dirt street out there so he piled bales of hops in the street, put the car on top of them and set fire to the lot right in the middle of town. The fire Department was there and stood by to see that everything was all right. He got his innings in and his money back as everyone helped to put out the fire so the wine and beer flowed freely. It was quite an occasion, [redacted] Couldn't do it now they wouldn't allow it.
"City grew?"
Yes it was a charming, when you got off the train you'd feel the joy of the city, friendly people and a great honesty, no one locked doors and no one bothered anyone.
I lived on Tupper St and met L. Burbank many times, dressed always called tea like he was going to a committee meeting smart always friendly, I saw him many times driving past on Sebastapol ave going to Sebastapol where he took care of his plants. He kept much to himself, not too social, but loved his plants and kept them labeled.
I knew Matt Doyle — originated the Exchange Bank and Dawson Dickson, he had a hardware store had about anything you wanted on 4th st ran through to 5th st. might now be compared to Friedmen Bros.
"We are out of time, will you come back again?" Yes I'd love to

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Oral History of Radford Leggett

3/3/1979 and 4/26/1988

I was a high school dropout. My dad had a hop ranch out west of town on Wright Road as it was known then, not Fulton, and near the creek. He had a hundred acres of hops, prunes and other fruits. When we had a storm there would be two feet of water back up, stayed for hours on top of the ground and dropped inches of silt, made for grand soil, the finest land.

I started high school and went the first year and part of the second, but hops went up to 12, 15 cents a pound, almost up to $1 a pound. They were in great demand. My dad said, " Why do you want to go to school when you could make money on the ranch?" So he gave me the ranch to run and I operated it at a time of horses and ploughs, no tractors at that time. I worked it for a year and then thought there has to be an easier way to make a living. About that time, we moved to Sebastopol Road. Dad bought ten acres, rather two parcels of ten acres, but they didn't adjoin, that was 1904. There was a house, but it had to be rebuilt to some degree. When I decided to quit the ranch, I got a job in town in a grocery store. One day I got a call from the owner and he said the President of the bank (the one with the clock on it) wants to see you and if you can arrange your lunch hour, go and see him. Well I sweated that out, I had a little account, but I hadn't written any checks so I couldn't figure out what he wanted with me. The upshot was he offered me a job. I had gone to Sweet's Business College and fortunately along with my regular studies, I took courses in typing and English. Pop Sweet was a friend of mine so guess he recommended me.

break

At the start of this was I resigned from the bank and guess because I had worked for a bank the powers that be thought I could handle it. I started out with 96 men to go up to Washington and four days before I was to leave I got a discharge from the army, and as far as I know I'm the only man to be discharged before I served a day. I didn't go back to the bank. I liked it and I did accounting, and on the counter and there was one week when there was a flu epidemic when I did all the work, cashier, Chief teller, gave loans, etc. One a day a man I know came in and said he needed a $1000 right away. OK so I got out the sheet, made out the loan and had him sign it and gave it back to me, and the President said it was OK.

After the war, I went to work for a friend he had Shell Oil plant. Boumer made a particular chicken spray made of oil and carbolic acid. I went out to mix some up in a 100-gallon drum blew up and I had oil all over me. I was a mess. Well a big car came driving up. A fellow was looking for Boumer. I said he went uptown he'll be back by the middle of the afternoon. He said 'I think I can find him' the town wasn't too big then,

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they came back and this fellow was sales manager for the Pacific Coast. He put me on the sales force. I'd go down to San Mateo, Richmond City and try to boost sales down there, then every three months they'd move me somewhere else and finally I didn't like that, so I resigned. Then I went into real estate in 1921. I retired in 1950. I had traveled just about everywhere and every way. I've had a good life.

Mike – I have a collection of pictures perhaps you can identify some of them. (P&SR pictures)

RL – Well I can't see too well; I've had eye surgery. Oh, I remember that car very well, Liddy station the end of Fulton Road

Mike – Do you remember the color of the cars?

RL – White with block lettering, I think.

Mike – Trim color around the windows?

RL – Don't remember. You have nice collection of pictures. The cars were bought from different companies that's whey they look different.

RL – NWP (Northwest Pacific RR) had a branch line from Santa Rosa to Sebastopol built in 1910. Don't know much about the train wreck it was about 1909 or 1910. One man badly scalded, a crew member. He lived but he was disfigured.

Talks about food costs. 'Could get a plate of beans or stew, bread and butter and milk for 15 or 20 cents.'

Train to Guerneville came up the coastline through naval station at Two Rock and on to Guerneville.

Started school when 8 years old – too far to go when he was younger. Teachers he remembered – Ellen Wills and Mr. Richardson.

Liberty Station was out of Petaluma towards Bloomfield – line put out there to haul lumber, hops, etc. taken to Petaluma to boats to that them to San Francisco.

Line out 4th Street to McDonald Ave to the cemetery. Many people went that way to the cemetery, got off visited folk's graves, perhaps had lunch that they had taken the took the train back.

(His father's people came across plains, but he didn't say where from).

Radford was successful in real estate and appraisal properties for Charles Rankin who sent him may customers.

LIVING HISTORY

TRANSCRIP OF A TAPED INTERVIEW
WITH RAFORD LEGGET, ON APRIL 3, 1979

Raford Legget: The earliest that I can remember of Luther Burbank as a child about 8, 9, 10 years old on Sebastopol Road. My folks had quite, a 10 acre piece of property, and as I was around the yards I would see Luther Burbank go by every morning in his buggy and horse to the Sebastopol Experimental Grounds. He found that sandy soil very acceptable to fruit work. And so he kept two...the one at Santa Rosa and the one at Sebastopol for the different types of fruits and vegetables and so forth that he was working with. The...this went on for quite a number of years that he went by. Then, in about 1912 I moved to.....I started working in the old Santa Rosa Bank, and a little later in '16 I was married and moved on Tupper Street, a few doors from Luther Burbank.

I was getting up to go to work in the morning at the bank. I would meet him usually out; he was working in his garden. He was out early always, and always to pass the time of the day. I found him a very interesting fellow to say Good Morning to, as you went by. So, I learned to know him quite well at that time. He then married Elizabeth the same year that we were married. So there was a kindred deal there.

Luther had worked on so many projects. The first one, of course, was the potato, which he had developed in Massachusetts before coming out here. That was a real success for which he received, I think, about $35.00, a very small sum, at least. But when he got out here, he found that he was looking for a better climate than he had back there and so Santa Rosa, as he has stated many times, was the ideal climate for what he wished to produce.

That spineless cactus was one of his products there, that he thought would develop for feed in arid countries. It never was a real success because there was not the actual need for it, apparently. The cattle would have certainly used it if they'd have had the opportunity in a country where they didn't have something else to eat. Its like us and strawberries: we probably will pass up the oatmeal and eat our strawberries. So he carried on with those. Some of his very interesting products was the plums, the Santa Rosa Plum and the Burbank Plum, as well as many other fruits. The walnuts, he did a lot of work in walnuts, in the Shasta Daisy, of course, was one of the plants that was known worldwide and planted. I happened to see some of it growing in India when I was there.

RL con't: So that you find that the world isn't that large afterall. But throughout the work he was a very humble, diligent man, a hard working fellow, but he was always dressed up. I never saw him when he wasn't in a suit and tie even when he was out in his work in the gardens. He, of course you must know that he had some help in the way of tilling the soil. But his work was not that, his work was the propogation of the plants and it takes years and years of selection. To him, of course, work was a God-given privilege and he felt that everybody should do their part of the world's work. But times change and it seems now that it isn't such a privilege anymore. They work because they want to eat and not because of the joy of producing something.

He was a religious man. There was a controversy over that, but my experience with him.....he believed in the supreme being, he believed in nature following the dictates and the heritage of plants as well as people. And that is how he, by patience, continual work, was able to produce new plants, new species of plants that had been in existance.

He was...joined the Masonic Fraternity in 1921 and its a parody there also that that was the same year that I joined the Fraternity. And he joined the Scottish Rite in 1922 and that was the same year that I joined there. So our lives have gone together quite extensively.

When Ford and Edison and Firestone were out here in 1915 in Santa Rosa, I was living on Tupper Street at that time, and remember the occasion when they all gathered over by the corner, by the Exchange Bank, and they had some quite ceremonies. At that time, Ford promised the first Fords and tractor to Mr. Burbank, and in due time it arrived. Well, I knew Burbank and I had changed and was working then for the Shell Oil Company, so I immediately went to see Luther and made arrangements that I would be privileged to put the oil and gas in the new tractor. Needless to say it was good advertisement for the company, so they were very happy to have me do it. But it was an interesting experience and the unfortunate part of it is that that particular tractor has been lost and the Ford Company would pay a handsome sum for it if it could ever be retrieved...

At one time they built a little office, a sort of... I wouldn't know what you would call it other than an office, on the corner of Santa Rosa Avenue and Tupper Street. That was there for advertising purposes,

RL con't: people coming in to see, pamphlets and so forth were kept there. That Ford did buy from them, or took it, maybe it was given to him by Burbank and they moved it back to his museum in the east.

John Hughes: I've heard about that. They used to sell seeds there.

RL: That's right, that's right, that's right!

Interviewer: You were talking about the Fords and tractor.

RL: Well, that was used around his property there for quite a number of years. Elizabeth was a very devoted helper to Luther. She was very interested. And as a matter of fact, I have kept in touch with her up until the last month of her life, and stopped in to see her every now and then.. Every year the Scottish Rite has put a wreath, on his birthday, Arbor Day, in his memory and she has always been at the window even though that she was an invalid, she was able to be at the window and to see that we've carried that on even to this day, we still do that.

Int: OK, I was trying to think, when you would talk to him, just chatting? I mean it was nothing....

RL: No. I was raised on a ranch as a young person and was interested in plants there. We raised hops and prunes and that sort of thing, some plums, and so there was something always to talk about there. I was interested in what he was doing, and he would tell me what he was hoping to develop out of it.

JH: Were you aware of his traveling to Sebastopol later, when you lived on Tupper, would you like see him in his Willys-Knight going over....?

RL: Yes, he went over there in the Willys. He carried on with the Sebastopol project there til towards the end, yes. And of course he, in his final days, he was buried under the cypress tree, cedars of Lebanon was what they were. And that tree is showing signs of the oak leaf fungus. So we hope that they're working on it to try to save it.

Int: I was talking to someone whose in the Native Plants Society and her next door neighbor's got a Cedars of Lebanon over in Sebastopol and she said that one looks so sick she was hoping that someone...

RL: They have been trying, they removed the earth and put in a drainage underneath it. One of the thoughts was that it was getting too much water. Well, of course all of the pines particularly are very suseptible to the oak leaf fungus, and so that one would be equally so.

As I said, Burbank was a very genteel man and very even tempered. I never saw him when he was....just as gentlemanly as could be.

JH: We heard a few stories, and I guess it would make sense, about kids going through his garden. And at that time he would let them know that they should'nt do that.

RL: That's right! That's right! He tried to dissuade them from causing any damage.

JH: They knew that.

RL: Yes, they knew that.

JH: Cause we were talking to Bob Whiting, you know Bob?

RL: Yes, I know Bob well.

JH: He said that when he was small he was visiting a friend and the Burbank Gardens used to go to the east a ways and they were playing in a wood pile overlooking the gardens and his young friend says to him "See that man over there? You don't go in his garden!"

RL: It was interesting to know that Hilliard Comstock, the judge that was here used to work over there in his younger days when he first got out of school and help Burbank.

JH: You know Mr. Hall?

RL: Yes.

JH: When he was young he lived on Pleasant Hill and he used to cut across his gardens on the way home because there was a short cut.

Int: In fact, Hill told somebody that he threw a rock at him.

RL: Well, you can imagine he would have a hard time today understanding the youth as it is developed, but he did have a lot of faith in the children, and did a great deal of work with them, particularly at Arbor Day times they would be planting, he loved to be with them.

JH: We have some pictures of him at the Burbank School with the kids at a celebration.

Int: My mother-in-law tells of getting to sing for him in school on his birthday. She remembers that very well.

RL: Well, he was certainly a great advantage to Santa Rosa. Over the years and world wide in the Britanica you'll find quite a story on Burbank; of his efforts and what he had done, what he'd accomplished. And so Santa Rosa got some publicity there.

JH: Now Sebastopol's trying to get a little bit!

RL: They'll do it, there's no question about that.

JH: We were very fortunate to get his house on the national register with national significance, which happens maybe one out of a hundred, something like that.

RL: Oh yes. That's right!

JH: So we're meeting with the Board of Directors, I talked with Mr. Winkler last night, who is on the Board for several years. He indicated that its been in the back of their mind to so something but they've never has the money, so as a Historical Society we are going to try to help them the best we can. Not to make it a full fledged museum, per se, but something for the residents.

RL: Well, that's what we'd like to do with the Sonoma County Museum here, is to have materials that could be placed in the smaller museums all around the county for a period of time and then keep rotating them around.

JH: And then maybe even some of the things that the smaller museums have could come to the large one.

RL: That's right. Because there's a lot of very valuable things in the small museums.

JH: We're going tomorrow, Rene Feliciano, the president of our group, and myself, are going to Contra Costa, its near Walnut Creek, and up to Mrs. Keil Clarke is her last name now, but she and her parents and brother lived in the Burbank cottege for several years...It was after, who's the fellow that did the survey? There was a fellow, and they both worked for Stark Brothers. But someone came there after he died for two years and then the Keil's came in '28, so she has some memorabilia, tools and things that were Burbank's and then, also, I guess some written material.

RL: The house here in town is supposed to be opened very shortly.

JH: That's right. I heard Bob Whiting, what was his comment? They said something about July and he said "What year?"

RL: That's probably right. Of course a lot of the things have been taken out to the National Museum, which is probably understandable. I had occasionally....Crafts wrote a book on Burbank, and I supplied, well I won't say all the information, because they had a basic knowledge of what they wanted in the first place, but through the Scottish Rite Museum we were able to go through all the old newspapers which I have back to 1925 and glean a lot of information and other...I've got old histories and old books that tell stories of Burbank.

JH: Oh, maybe you can answer a question. Someone contributed some newspapers to us, Sebastopol Times, Press Democrat, Santa Rosa Republican, and this one issue, I forgot the month but it was 1928, and the

headline was "$250,000 Toward Burbank Museum" and I proceeded to read the article and it told about how it was going to be not just a Santa Rosa effort, but a State effort, and it commented about Mr. Boggs and different State Senators and Congressmen, and Mr. Doyle, who was a prime mover behind it, but apparently something happened.

RL: It died a natural death.

JH: Was it the depression?

RL: I presume it was during the depression times. Now Doyle was very interested in the Burbank deal there, and had hoped that we would be able to have a good museum out of it. But as I have....I've worked on museums since 1920, trying to get a....originally a Santa Rosa Museum and then developed into the county museum, and its the same trouble; money is what we need and never have been able to get enough of a nucleus of enough to get started. And the unfortunate thing about the museum now is that we're afraid they're going to set the building over there and just walk away from it. And they would like...we have a few dollars, of course, that we've accumulated, but we wanted to use that to establish the museum. There is going to be a lot of expense there and if we have to take the money to put together the building, we certainly can't do anything more than set up some rough shells. So its trying. You never can get the..... at least I never have been. I think I work on the wrong end, maybe. You've got to put the idea in the politician's head, I guess, and let him run with it. I never tried that. I had opportunities to have acquired the old, well, not the <u>old</u> Elk's, but the Elk's building that was down on Eighth Street, that big building that was razed. Folsom has it for a long time. Well, it covered a quarter of the block. It was a beautiful big building with a beautiful auditorium in it. And it was build in the wrong place, at the time the Elks built it down there and went in over their heads and lost it of course. I could have bought it from the insurance company that held the loan for $45,000. And I offered to sell it to the City which included the commission and the City said "No, we'll never need it, we have no use for it." I tried real hard at it, I even went so far as to say "Well, forget the commission, I'll be glad to do it just for the City." What I wanted to so was to take that building and put the fire department, aquire the rest of the block, which could have

been had very cheap at that time, after the depression, and make a Civic Center out of it, which would have been ideal, because the building had a marvelous auditorium in it.

JH: Ya, and in this day and age, to build an auditorium, especially with a stage, when you start talking about fire, very elaborate fire sprinkler systems...

RL: Yes, and the proscenium has to be braced and designed and you've got to have concrete or steel floors and you've got to have more things. We're finding that out...it may be for the time being ..have to eliminate the stage at the Scottish Rite, put it in the plan but just don't build it now because it'll be quite expensive. A lot of things that have gone on in the town that if they would listen to somebody that had experience they could have had a lot of things here. But the politicians are not interested.

JH: They're interested in votes.

RL: That's the whole thing. Promises from.....I lost the Crocker Terrace lost $35,000 on it....on promises from the politicians. They were going to give us a break on the taxes and so we sold, oh a third of the lots, and within six months after we made that agreement they changed. A new election came along and those were out and we didn't get any of it. They put them right on at sale price and cleaned us out. We couldn't sell them, you know the depression. We offered those for $1,200 a piece, those lots.

JH: Is that at Monticito Heights?

RL: No. Crocker (?) Terrace. I put on Crocker Terrace and the first addition of Grace Addition and the Talbot Addition were my three major additions. See, I've been retired since 1950.

Int: I remember when we lived in Cloverdale, Crocker Terrace in Santa Rosa was the place to live!

RL: Well, those homes at that time that were built to sell for about $6,500 now cost you $100,000 even though they're 50 years old!

JH: Is that near Montgomery Village where the walnut orchard used to be?

RL: No. Its right here. It begins over at St. Helena and up to Pacific, that whole triangle out in there....It's bordered on Fourth Street, St. Helena, Pacific. Well, its a changing world.

Int: We were wondering if maybe even the Burbank house, if there is anything from the Sebastopol farm or whether everything had been stored there would have been there is either gone or.....?

RL: I'm afraid they are. Those things that weren't salvaged at the time would gradually disappear.

Int: Who is in control? The niece has control, or the City?

RL: No, the government has that. It's to be a national monument.

Int: So everything in the house, except personal.....

RL: It's somewhat tied to the college.

Int: Oh, OK. So it's a rather complicated situation.

RL: The building itself will be put on exhibition, I believe. The college is to supervise for it.

JH: Because apparently going quite a few years back, the college has been involved in ti.

RL: They've been involved in it right along.

Int: We should find the tractor!

RL: That would be wonderful! If we could find the tractor we could build our museum!

JH: I'll talk to George Smith. He bought...you know the Willys-Knight was in a junk yard and a Mr. Polson who used to do the maintainance on it you may have known him.....

RL: Yes.

JH: And he wrote a nice big three page letter one time about how a kid, who wasn't Mr. Polson, but someboby put too much oil in it, in the Willys, and that will be on display with the car. And maybe we can put George on the track (of the tractor).

RL: I don't think so because the Ford Company made quite a survey to try to look into it and they never were able to....I think if anyone had it they would have been coming out with it because....it probably, like a lot of old cars, went gradually and finally landed up in the demolition yard, otherwise it would be showing up somewhere.

JH: What year was that? Around 1918? RL: '15

JH: '15 they were out here, but it was a couple.....

RL: Yes, it was a couple of years before the tractor arrived, yes.

Int: David Burbank was telling us about the fact that he had gotten the tractor.

RL: I had one like it over on Auburn Farm thats over on the Valley of the Moon over there. We had a ranch over there and they were quite an old tractor. They were kind of like a bucking horse, you had to watch them. They...if you got too much power on them they would go backward. You see, the gears, the front end would lift. You had to be quick and get that front end back down again, if you didn't it would crawl right up on its own gears and go I don't know where. It got a good many people killed. But they were perfectly good tractors....they were a little hard to start sometimes, but they were all metal so you could start a little fire under the carburator and get it hot! I've done that before now!

END INTERVIEW